

E. L. Harris
for Rev. St. John Johnson
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AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE.

A NEW-YEAR SERMON,

PREACHED SUNDAY, JANUARY 9th, 1887,

TO THE

CONGREGATION OF ST. PHILIP'S CHURCH,

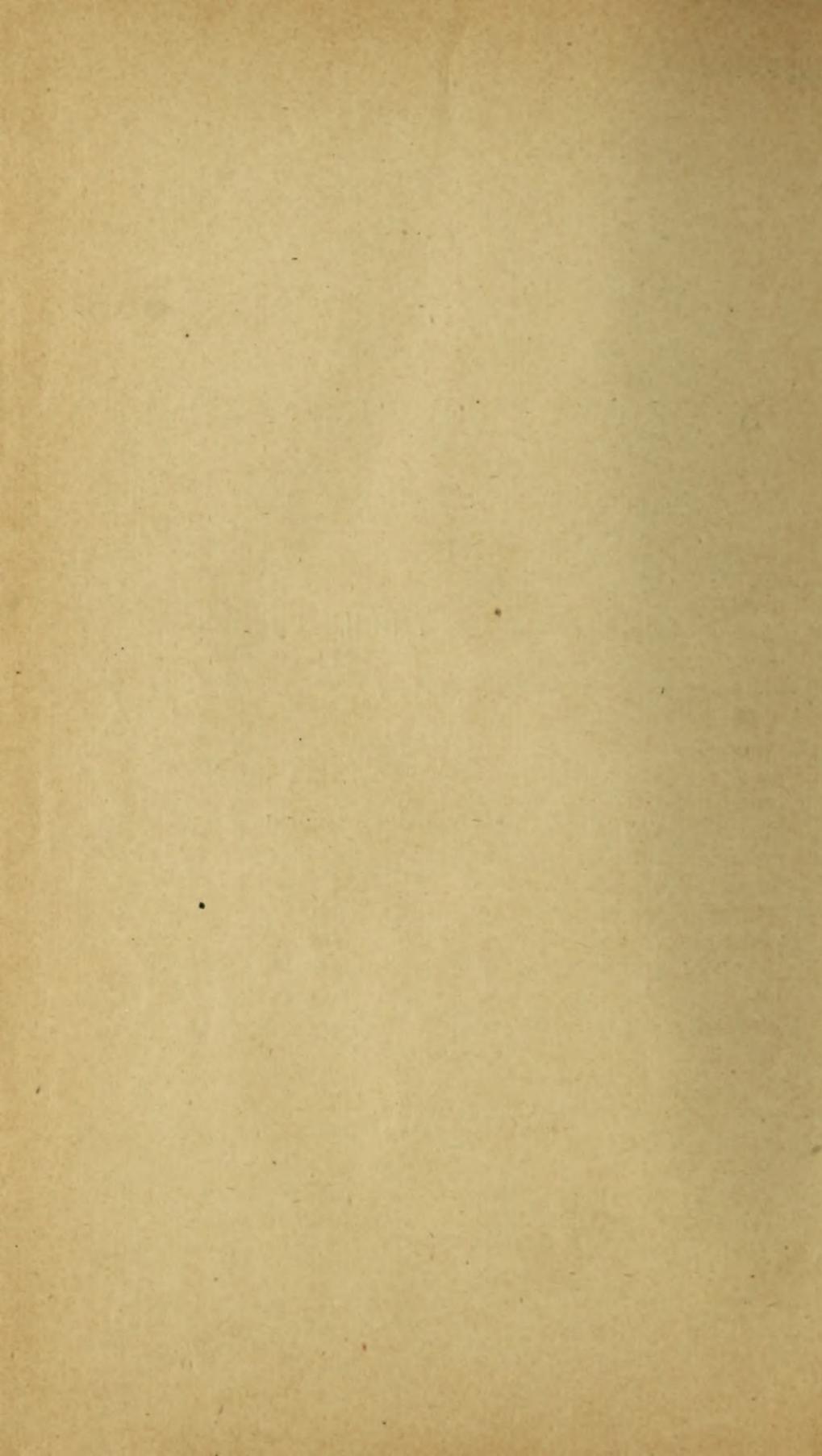
CHARLESTON, S. C.,

BY

REV. JOHN JOHNSON, RECTOR.

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SERMON.

PSALM 50:15.

"I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

The Almighty God speaks thus through the lips of the psalmist, addressing the words of the text to his feeble creature, Man : " I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." The sentence is prophetic : it looks forward to the remote deliverance of the Gospel with its resulting obligations, to the remote event of the Incarnation, with all its blessings and all its duties. But the words have also a direct, an immediate reference to deliverance from dangers in this present life, and to gratitude for the same, giving glory to God for present help in time of need.

We live in a community, which in the past year has both been visited and delivered by the hand of God. With the City of Charleston, our Parish has been identified from the earliest period of its foundation, two centuries ago, to the present moment. Scarcely had the woodman's axe cleared a space for the first settlement, when among the colonists there were steps taken to build the first Church of St. Philip on the spot where St. Michael's, forty years afterwards, was erected and now stands. From that day to this, through all "the changes and chances of this mortal life," through wars and peace, fire, pestilence and tempest, the congregations of St. Philip's, for eight generations, have shared with their fellow-citizens the vicissitudes of an eventful history. Fifty-two years ago, we saw our second colonial Church in ruins, after a destructive fire. Twenty-three years ago, our third church, the present one, was considerably injured by the bombardment of the city, and its services suspended for about two years. The cyclone of August, 1885, again damaged it. The earthquake of last summer nearly shook it to the ground.

No event in our local or parochial history can be compared with this last. For, over and beyond the loss of life and property which it caused, the terrors and distresses of that first night, together with the anxious days, nights, and weeks that followed, have registered themselves on our hearts and minds in indelible characters.

True, there should mingle with those painful recollections other memories of merciful escapes and glad deliverances in that time of peril,—memories that should never be allowed to fade away. To find ourselves, assembling together, this New Year, with not one person missing, by reason of that calamity, from our hundred and seventy-five families; to remember that when we left our houses in alarm, our flight was not in such wintry weather as now we have; to remember that, though deprived of our Church, we have been permitted to assemble for divine worship with no intermission of services; to sum up, as was done in the Report of last Sunday, a total of church offerings and contributions for 1886 only a hundred dollars less than that for 1885; to record donations of money from many directions towards repairing and rebuilding our Church property,—such considerations should lift up our hearts in praise and gratitude to Almighty God.

Yet, after all, the facts of public and private loss, of municipal, parochial, and individual loss, remain to give us serious thought and deep concern. Let us review together some of the leading events of the Parish, since the end of August last.

As soon as examination could be made, the Vestry informed itself concerning the damages received on the night of the 31st of August. As regards the Church, it appeared that the main body of its steeple was unhurt, but that a section of it, immediately below the spire, had been partly thrown down. The falling of some heavy masses of brick and iron from that height caused three severe injuries to the building below, viz: the breaking through of the roof over the southern gallery, the destruction of the roof of the southern porch, and the damaging of the western porch.

In the interior, but little plastering had been thrown down. The beautiful Corinthian columns with the full ornamentation of the order in stucco-work, appeared not at all injured; but cracks over the arches of the chancel, and in the arch above and behind the organ, bore witness to the destructive violence of the first heavy shocks. The organ itself escaped injury, and so also did the stained-glass windows. None of the wood-work of the pulpit, reading-desk or chancel, or panelling of the galleries, was injured. And yet it was impracticable to hold services in the Church, even if a part of the congregation had been willing to venture there. The large breach in the roof over the southern gallery rendered the building too open to the weather, and fragments of loosened plaster might fall at any moment. Accordingly, it was decided to seek some place for the worship of the congregation on the next Sunday, and St. Stephen's Chapel, Anson Street, became our place of refuge during all the month of September; except that on Sunday afternoons, a service was held, during that month, in private rooms of a member of the Vestry, kindly lent us for that purpose, in the lower part of the city.

I am sure we drew nigh to God in spirit and in truth, and He drew nigh to us at those times of alarm, unrest, and perplexity. For several reasons our congregations were not large in September. Some families had been absent before, some left the city after the great shock: some found the places of assembly inconveniently distant: others felt anxious about leaving home for more than an hour at a time: all felt strange in strange places and unaccustomed seats. But it was good for us to be there where the Bread of Life was broken: we did well in not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Few of us can forget, how in Anson Street, and in Gibbes Street, we humbled ourselves under the mighty hand of God; how we reached out to feel, with the touch of faith, the reality of the everlasting arms of God, that were, all the while, our unseen, but most strong support. It was then, indeed, that we called upon Him, as a congregation, in the time of trouble. He did deliver us, according to His faithful word, and we should glorify Him.

With the coming in of the month of October, our way was made clearer by the very generous tender of this commodious room, in the name of a leading business firm of Charleston.* The Vestry gratefully accepted the offer, and immediately fitted the room for services, by bringing hither some of the sacred furniture of St. Philip's, and making everything ready for our use on the first Sunday of that month.

It is to be hoped, that no further change, or removal, may be found necessary, until the time for the re-opening of our Church, and our glad return to its sacred courts. Meanwhile, the work of repair has been begun, and everything is made to look forward hopefully to our holding Easter services there, on the second Sunday in April. Not that all work of restoration will then be completed, but sufficient to enable us to resume the use of the main body of the Church. We shall have to enter by the doors of the cross-aisle, as neither the vestibule nor the organ-gallery can be made ready by that date. As to the probable cost of repairs, and the ways and means provided, or to be provided, your Vestry has not furnished me with definite information. The work is done by day's labor, and not by contract. I can only say, that there was no authority for the public statement made some weeks ago, which put the cost at from \$25,000 to \$30,000. I have never heard the Vestry mention any probable cost higher than \$15,000, nearly one-half of which has already been provided through donations from without the Diocese. Even though our hopes, from the Appeal of the House of Bishops to the Church in the United States, have not been, and may never be, realized, you should not let any spectre of debt rise before you to discourage your outlook. The sum to be raised will not be likely to exceed \$6,000 or \$7,000, and may be borrowed on the security of your Glebe lands. This latter property has itself been injured, however, to the extent of about ten per cent. of its estimated value.

Together with the Church, the Sunday-School building has suffered damage, estimated at from \$1,000 to \$1,500.

The St. Philip's Church Home, on the Queen Street wing of the building, the older part, has been considerably damaged, so much so as to require the disuse of those rooms until the spring, when it is hoped that both repairs and improvements may be made. The Bishop has set-apart some portion of the rebuilding-fund for that purpose, I am told, three thousand dollars; but it is likely that more will be required for actual improvements, over and above repairs.

At present, the lady inmates, though a little crowded, have been made comfortable for the winter, occupying almost entirely the Church Street wing of the building. Under the trying circumstances of their danger and exposure during the earthquake nights last summer, none of them, I am happy to say, were made to suffer very seriously in health. While some of them were very infirm, and all were anxious and distressed at the calamity which suddenly turned them out of doors to seek their safety in the open air, I recall with pleasure, and a pardonable pride in woman's power of self-control, the admirable conduct which they exhibited. I give glory to God for the testimony of His grace granted them, to calm and steady their feeble nerves, to brace their shrinking frames against impending danger.

Among the many vivid scenes my memory of that dreadful night has pictured on its tablets, there will ever remain a group of houseless women, seated amid the graves of the eastern church-yard, speaking in low tones to one another; the starry vault of the midnight heavens overhead; and, standing out from their heights of darkness, the steeple of St. Philip's lighted up by threatening fires.

There remains a pleasing duty to be discharged in chronicling for your information the generous gifts of individuals, and the offerings of some thoughtful congregations of our Church in the United States, which have been sent to me for distribution. A small part only came for the designated purpose of rebuilding St. Philip's. By far the greater part came to be dispensed among the needy, the sick, the suffering of the Parish and entire community.

First, towards rebuilding the Church, I received in Sep-

tember from a society of ladies connected with the Parish of the Monumental Church in Richmond, Va., \$15. Later, from Holy Trinity—New York City, through Rev. Dr. McKim, the Rector, \$156, and from a friend in Galveston, Texas, \$35. These latter sums were paid over by me to the Bishop: the former to our Parish Treasurer, together with \$5 from an individual; while \$10 from two individuals were paid by me to the Treasurer of the St. Philip's Church Home. Altogether, under this head of rebuilding, I received about \$200. I am not exact in returning it here, because the offering from New York was entered by the Bishop in his general fund for the city Churches, St. Philip's having a certain part, as his books will show. The large donation from Old Trinity Parish was received through the Vestry, and was on a previous occasion referred to by me in addressing you.

Then, from eight other Parishes, two in North Carolina, two in Virginia, one in Central New York, one in Massachusetts, one in Vermont, and one in South Carolina, there were sent me, for the sufferers by the earthquake, offerings to the amount of \$445.86. And, from a Parish in Westchester County, New York, came a large box of clothing.

While, for the same object, donations from fourteen individuals were received by me, to the amount of \$940. I say fourteen individuals, that being the number of those only who were known to me in the transaction or correspondence. Thus two members of this congregation transmitted to me sums received from Baltimore, amounting to \$312.00. Bishop Howe gave me for distribution \$150.00, of the amount sent him from other Dioceses. To summarise:

I received for rebuilding.....	\$200.00
From eight Parishes for the sufferers.....	445.86
From fourteen or more persons for the sufferers..	940.00
Total.....	\$1,585.86

Of the funds sent for distribution, one hundred dollars

went by designation to one person, fifty dollars by designation to two persons, forty in like manner to four persons. Where the distribution was left to me, as it was for the most part, I apportioned the money in sums, varying with the necessity of the case, from two to twenty-five dollars, and in this mode of distribution more than eighty individuals and families were assisted, counting a family as but one individual.

It was, indeed, a privilege to cause "the widow's heart to sing for joy," and the despondent to be cheered with hope, at such a time of wide-spread anxiety and distress. It was then that I was permitted through the bounty of others to see and know with them, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Not that my blessing, as almoner, was to be compared with theirs who gave me to distribute, but it was mine to receive for them the pressure of a grateful hand, the tribute of a tear-filled eye, the broken utterance of "God bless you," from their beneficiaries.

And so, the eventful year of our Lord, 1886, drew to its close with many a thanksgiving to Almighty God, within and without our Parish, for his great deliverance, and His raising up friends to aid and comfort us in our adversity. Our beautiful temple, threatened to its downfall, has yet been spared us, and we have been helped to restore it. Our lives have been given us from the very jaws of death, to glorify God in the years which remain.

When I visited St. Philip's Church with your sexton to examine its interior, a few hours after the great shock, we had first to clamber over the wreck of the roof piled up in the southern porch. As we together entered the vestibule, lighted by a candle, making darkness visible, and passed up the middle aisle toward the chancel, a small object at my feet attracted my attention. I stooped and picked it up. It proved to be a perfect little flower, which had fallen from among the stucco, or plaster, ornaments of the vaulted ceiling overhead. I took it home and have kept it, for the lesson it would teach us all—"cast down but not destroyed." Again, as I turned away from the chancel, and was passing to the

vestibule, my eyes lifted upward, caught sight of the bright stars shining down through the large break in the roof of the south gallery. An unwonted, an unwelcome, sight to a beholder in its bare reality of sense and substance, but oh, how grateful, how familiar, in their emblematic lesson for the children of God, seemed the stars to me that night! Through loss to gain! Through toil and turmoil to rest! Through darkness to light! Through ruin and decay to lasting habitations in glory unfading and eternal!

Sometimes our faith all but fails us, when much buffeted by adversity, with clouded, darkened, skies above us, we strive to penetrate, in human foresight, to the secret purpose of the Most High. Our faith *would* fail us; but what is our faith? It is not in ourselves, our feelings, fervors, heats or raptures. All the value, all the eternal worth, of "precious faith" comes from the fixed, eternal, heavenly object, to which the eye of faith is directed. That object is out of and above ourselves. It is the Divine Word. It is the Divine Person of the Son of God, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

Though, to our dust-clouded eyes, He should appear, at times, but as a speck of light upon the face of darkness, but as a dim star shining down upon us in the night of trouble, yet be it ours to keep the eyes ever turned to this Word of God! In its light we shall see light: by its holy teaching we shall be informed: by its guiding, as by a light shining in a dark place,—as by the leading of a star, the wise men from the east were at this season led to the babe in Bethlehem,—so, by the Word of God in these Holy Scriptures, as we honour them, shall we be led, from faith to knowledge, from knowing in part now, to knowing in perfection then, to the full fruition of the Godhead, the complete and blissful enjoyment of the everlasting presence and love of God.—*Amen.*